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PP RUEH DU RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHROV RUEHTRO
DE RUEHDJ #0449/01 1331745
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 121745Z MAY 08 ZDK CTG NUMEROUS SERVICES
FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9239
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISQON USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0104

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000449

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/E, IO, AND INR/GGI
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA-WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/12/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PBTS](#) [PHSA](#) [DJ](#) [ER](#) [SO](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI-ERITREA: FRANCE CAUTIOUS ABOUT U.N. ACTION

REF: A. DJIBOUTI 443

[1](#)B. DJIBOUTI 432 (AND PREVIOUS)

DJIBOUTI 00000449 001.3 OF 002

Classified By: DCM ERIC WONG. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Bound by mutual defense treaties to defend Djibouti, and with over 3,000 troops stationed in the country, France seeks to deQe rising tensions between Djibouti and Eritrea through diplomatic means, including the possible dispatch of a special envoy. According to France's Ambassador in Djibouti, there is no immediate need for UNSC action until all bilateral efforts and efforts by regional organizations have been exhausted. Lack of such action, however, threatens to weaken Djibouti's government, as the GODJ has not only raised expectations of UN action, but also faces the difficult economic burden of sustaining a major portion of its military near the border to counter encroachment from Eritrea. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) In a May 12 meeting with Ambassador, France's Ambassador to Djibouti Dominique Decherf outlined French efforts to address continued Djibouti-Eritrean border tensions resulting from the Eritrean military's incursion into Djiboutian territory as Ras Doumeira (reftels). Jean de Gliniasty, the French MFA's A/S-equivalent for Africa, had twice summoned Eritrea's Ambassador to France. According to Decherf (STRICTLY PROTECT), Eritrea's Ambassador to France had told Gliniasty that Eritrea had no claim on Djibouti, but rejected the notion of establishing a 5-km "no man's land" between Eritrean and Djiboutian forces at Ras Doumeira. The Eritrean Ambassador had also reportedly stated, falsely, that it was President Isaias who had initiated a telephone call to President Guelleh (rather than vice versa), and that Djibouti was stirring up tensions. Gliniasty had called for the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) to explain what it was doing at the border with Djibouti, and to discuss its intentions. France's Ambassador in Asmara planned to call on the Eritrean presidency later on May 12, Decherf added. (Decherf noted that French MFA officials had been on leave since May 8, due to Armistice Day and Pentecostal hQays.)

FRANCE: EXHAUST REGIONQEFFORTS PRIOR TO UNSC ACTION

[1](#)3. (C) France was ready to dispatch a special envoy, Decherf said; if that envoy were refused by Eritrea, then the issue would be a matter for the UNSC. However, Decherf asserted

that there was no immediate need for the UNSC to act until all bilateral efforts and efforts by regional organizations (AU, Arab League, possibly even the OIC) had been exhausted. Contrary to the Djiboutian Foreign Minister's earlier assertions that similar incidents had occurred in 1994 and 1996, Decherf said Djibouti-Eritrea tensions had risen in May 1996 and 1998; in 1996, Djibouti had submitted a written appeal to the UNSC but had then resolved the matter without UNSC action, when the then-Djiboutian Foreign Minister had traveled to Asmara. The international community needed to defuse the situation, not agitate the GODJ further, Decherf said. It was best for the situation to be resolved quietly, as it had been in 1996, Decherf said, perhaps through concerted but low-key efforts by several external actors.

ERITREA OPPOSES DJIBOUTI'S ROLE IN SOMALI RECONCILIATION

¶4. (C) UNSC consultations on Djibouti-Eritrea needed to underscore the strategic importance of the area (near the Bab-al-Mandeb strait, the narrowest point between the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea), and therefore the need to avoid conflict, Decherf said, while also weighing the interests of Ethiopia and regional organizations such as the Arab League. Djibouti's constructive role in hosting ongoing reconciliation talks between Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the Asmara-backed Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) presented a strong argument for calling Eritrea to stop pressuring Djibouti, Decherf said. Noting that Eritrean fortifications at Ras Doumeira had begun in February but had been discovered only in April, he observed that Djibouti's role in hosting Somali talks could not have been the catalyst for Eritrea's original

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incursion. However, the current stalemate over Ras Doumeira was likely linked to Eritrea's opposition to Djibouti's role in Somali issues. On the other hand, some Arab League members believed that Eritrea's incursion was meant to scuttle business plans to construct a massive land bridge linking Djibouti and Yemen.

DJIBOUTI FACING HIGH COSTS AND EXPECTATIONS

¶5. (C) Decherf cautioned that Djibouti had raised high expectations by appealing for UNSC action; failure to issue a PRST on Djibouti-Eritrea would therefore be "difficult" for the GODJ. Decherf expressed concern about public criticism in Djibouti of the Djiboutian government's handling of the current crisis, and about "street reports" that Djiboutians had been asked to pay a "war tax" to cover the extraordinary cost of maintaining nearly one-third of the Djiboutian military in the north, near Ras Doumeira. France was assisting with the Djiboutian deployment, he said, but had not been asked to send French troops to nearby Doumeira Island. Questioned about French tripwires for active military intervention by French forces in Djibouti, Decherf responded only that France had told the GSE that if there were an "open clash" between Eritrea and Djibouti, then "France will be on Djibouti's side; there is no ambiguity about that."

¶6. (C) COMMENT. Figuring out how to have Eritrea respond positively to reduce tensions with Djibouti is a difficult question, and one that cannot be resolved by Djibouti alone. Concerted international effort is needed. Post advocates strong USG support for Djibouti's call to reverse Eritrea's militarization of Ras Doumeira, a previously uninhabited area dominating the Bab-al-Mandeb strait, whose strategic location between the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea is key to international shipping. Public statements, such as a UNSC PRST, should, inter alia, call on both parties to: respect each other's territorial integrity; reduce tensions in the

immediate area near the Bab-al-Mandeb strait by withdrawing recently introduced military forces; and work together with the international community to resolve the issue peacefully, consistent with international law. Recent indications that Eritreans have expanded their presence to Doumeira Island are troubling, as Djibouti considers the island to be entirely Djiboutian territory, not split. Decherf noted that Vichy France claimed sovereignty over the entire island, when it offered the island to Mussolini. END COMMENT.
SYMINGTON